

ADDRESS

To the Members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church IN CANADA.

Within the last two years a series of circumstances has occurred in connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Church in London, of a character deeply to be deplored, inasmuch as it has resulted in the withdrawal of a large portion of the membership of the Society in this place. Among those who have so withdrawn, may be enumerated many who have been connected with the Methodist Church since its first establishment here, and who have watched and labored for its prosperity, both spiritually and temporally, from its earliest infancy; many of whom it may be said, that "they have borne the burden and heat of the day," and who have never shirked their duty, when either their time, their talents or their means, were required to aid the cause in which they had embarked for the voyage of life.

To cause the withdrawal of upwards of one hundred members from a church, among whom were many who had held official positions of several years standing, and others whose ties and associations were of a life-long nature, there must have been, or what appeared to them to be, good and sufficient reasons for the course pursued; or their grievances must have been, when no redress could be obtained, of a nature no longer endurable.

By a plain and simple statement of the facts, it will be attempted to be shown, first: That they labored under grievances from which they could obtain no redress; and secondly, that the state of affairs afforded sufficient cause for a considerable number to separate, however reluctantly, from a church which had hitherto claimed all their love and obedience.

In the Wesleyan Methodist Annual Conference meeting of 1859, for certain causes, it was deemed advisable to remove from the Book Room at Toronto, the Rev. G. R. Sanderson, who for some years had been entrusted with the management of that Concern, and he was then appointed to the London City Circuit, as assistant to the Rev. Dr. Cooney, who was at the same time appointed to London for the second year. The appointment of two married preachers to this station naturally entailed upon the Society an increased expenditure, which the income was not adequate to meet, and at the third Quarterly Meeting of that year, viz: in Feb. 1860, a Committee was appointed to report to an adjourned Quarterly Meeting, "on the financial position of the Church." A Report was accordingly prepared, submitted and adopted, recommending that but one preacher only be sent to this Station by the Conference for the ensuing year. Consequently, at the fourth Quarterly Meeting a resolution to the following effect was moved, seconded, and adopted:

"That the Recording Steward be instructed to communicate with the Stationing Committee, and request them to appoint such minister to labor among us as they may deem best suited to our present condition, and that one of the three following gentlemen be named as the choice of the ministers available during the following year, viz: Rev. Messrs. Douglas, Elliott, or Grimley."

It will thus be seen by the foregoing resolution, that neither of the preachers, then resident in London, were asked for, but some one of the three ministers named in the resolution, either of whom would

have been acceptable. The Rev. Dr. Cooney, who was esteemed and respected, was thought to be unable to assume the duties in his own person which had been previously allotted to two, and the labors, or rather the non-labors of his coadjutor, had not been during the year altogether acceptable to the Society.

A copy of the Report, together with the Resolution of the Quarterly Board was duly submitted to the President of the Conference, previous to the session of that body in 1860, but if ever presented to the Conference, proved of no avail, as the Rev. Mr. Sanderson was now selected as Superintendent for London. On the receipt of this intelligence a meeting of all the official members resident in the city, was immediately called. Twenty-three members of the Quarterly Board attended, not one of whom expressed the sentiment that it would be for the benefit of the society to have Mr. S. returned. A resolution to this effect was passed, and also one authorizing the Recording Steward to proceed to Kingston, where the Conference was in session, and use his best exertions to have some one, other than Mr. Sanderson, sent to London. A copy of these resolutions was presented to Mr. S. at Kingston by the Rev. Mr. Berry, with the hope that this additional expression of feeling, on the part of the people here, might induce him to seek some other field of labor, but the obstinacy of the man prevailed over every other consideration, and he determined to force himself upon an unwilling people. This decision being known here, a telegram was sent to the President, on the morning of the second Wednesday of the Session, and was worded in the following language:

LONDON, C. W., 12th June 1860.

Dr. Stinson, President Wesleyan Conference, Kingston:

SIR:—

Mr. Sanderson cannot be received. Send Mr. Borland and save the church from entire ruin. See resolutions forwarded by Mr. Berry.

(Signed.)

George Tyas, Steward.

Samuel Peters, Leader.

J. White, Leader.

Samuel McBride, Steward & Trustee.

John Learey, Leader.

W. Borland, Local Preacher.

B. Lawson, Steward.

Ed. Tonkin, Leader.

W. Willis, Steward.

H. H. Dart, Superintendent S. S.

George Oliver, Steward.

James Loveless, Local Preacher.

John Elson, Leader.

Samuel Sereaton, Leader,

Simeon Merrill, Leader.

Anthony Kenleyside, Local Preacher.

This message, signed by sixteen of the official members of the church, sent in full time to accomplish the desired object, and on a matter of such vital interest, the President put into his pocket and took no further notice of it. Subsequently, upon being spoken to upon the subject, he stated "that he did not receive the telegram until the Friday, and after the appointments were all confirmed." The telegraph messenger's book, however, shows the initials of the President's signature attached in receipt of the telegram, at the hour of 10: 40 A. M. on Wednesday, clearly proving that the President had the document in his possession for two days prior to the appointments being confirmed.

Thus, in opposition to every effort, and every remonstrance which the Quarterly Board and church had it in their power to make, did the

Rev. G. R. Sanderson return to London, endorsed by the President and Conference as the best and most fit man London could have. The people however were not satisfied, and although they were graciously informed that the Conference knew what was for their good, better than they themselves did ; yet, they still contended that the properly expressed wish of the church had been set at nought, its only utterance suppressed, and its desires unheeded ; and the result was, that a petition setting forth their complaints, and praying the President to remove Mr. S. was prepared and signed by upwards of one hundred and thirty persons, seventeen of whom held office in the church. This petition was duly forwarded, and the wishes of the petitioners fairly urged, by a deputation appointed to wait upon the President for that purpose. The President then convened a meeting in London, at which he presided, when the subject matter of the petition was discussed. On this occasion the President admitted : " *that the appointment of Mr. Sanderson was perhaps injudicious ; that no doubt, from absence from the regular work he was somewhat rusty ; that he was to blame for not attempting to conciliate those who were opposed to him, but hoped the Society would bear with him as his appointment was only for one year, at the end of which time his connection with the Society would cease.*"

The result of this meeting was a conviction in the minds of many, if not all, that the wishes of the people, even when officially expressed, were held as of no value when opposed to the desire or convenience of a leading member of the Conference.

Mr. S. determined to hold on to his position in London, indifferent as to the result, and nothing was left for the dissatisfied people, but abject and servile submission to the " authorities in power," or severance from a church with which they had been long connected, and to which they were warmly attached.

At this crisis of affairs some withdrew and joined other churches ; others determined to remain and bear with matters in the best way they could for another year, being unwilling to separate themselves from the church of their adoption.

But the effect of all this could not be otherwise than demoralizing, nor did the course pursued by Mr. S. tend to conciliate or diminish the dislike entertained towards him ; insult and vindictiveness marked his conduct towards those who had petitioned for his removal, or whom he thought opposed to him, and even private character and reputation were not free from his attacks.

Time passed on, until the last Quarterly Meeting of the year, viz: May 1861, when after the regular business of the evening was disposed of, about ten o'clock, the question was put from the Chair, " Is there any other business in connection with the Circuit ? " No response was made : Again the same question was asked and no reply elicited, thus leaving members who might have anticipated some resolution bearing upon the appointments for the coming year to conclude that no action of the kind was intended. But, vain delusive hope ! In the pocket of a member of that Board then present, ready prepared, and only waiting for the fitting time to be produced, was a resolution relating to this matter of appointments. About eleven o'clock a motion for adjournment was made and seconded, but which the Chairman refused to put ; and adjourned business relative to accounts connected with the Trust Fund was then taken up and served to occupy the time until about half past one o'clock in the morning ; then, and not till then, when two-thirds of the members had withdrawn and ten only remained, who probably were in the secret ; then it was, at an hour and a half after midnight, with a Board of twenty-eight members reduced to ten, the most important business of the meeting was brought up ; the precious resolution was produced, and carried by eight to two, asking for the return of the same preachers for the ensuing year.

It might naturally be asked, Is it possible, a person with the feelings

of a man, could quietly sit and watch the course pursued to retain him another year, after the action that had been taken to remove him the year previous ? Is it credible that after he had been foisted on the church here in opposition to a large number of the leading members, in spite of deputations, messages and petitions, to secure whose return it was found necessary to adopt the most unworthy means, and the people imploringly besought to bear with him but one more year ? Is it possible that human nature could so debase itself, and sit unblushing under such cool effrontery ? Yet such was the case, and the resolution no sooner passed, than it was duly paraded in the columns of the *Christian Guardian*, and the Superintendent, fully equipped with such a certificate, prepared to go and ask Conference to decide upon his return to London, *because the Society wished it to be so*. And the Conference, ever willing to grant the legitimate wishes of the people, graciously consented, and Mr. S. was again duly appointed Superintendent of the London City Circuit for the second year.

But was there no opposition to his return ? had the Society been sufficiently whipped into submission to learn they had no voice in the matter ? Had they yet acquired the virtue of placing implicit confidence in the wisdom and consideration of the clergy ? The sequel will show. Several members of the official Board naturally felt indignant at the clandestine manner in which the resolution referred to had been passed ; and when Conference met in June last at Bransford, a petition was prepared and signed by a *majority* of the Quarterly Board, praying for the removal of Mr. S. and protesting against his return. This was presented to the President, who actually refused to present the same before the Stationing Committee, because it was not *official*. It may be here remarked, the opposition offered to the return of Mr. S. in 1860, was the legitimate action of the Quarterly Board, offered both by petition and remonstrance, and no attention was paid to it. The opposition offered in 1861, though not the official action of the Board, in consequence of the plot above described, was the act of a majority of that Board, as was proved to the President in the presence of Mr. S., he not being able to refute it.

But to continue—three several times did deputations proceed from London to Bransford, and urge upon the President and other members, and that in the presence of Mr. S., the evils that would inevitably result should he return. The President as head of the Conference was directly appealed to on behalf of the Society here, and his reply on one occasion is worthy of note, viz; " If Mr. Sanderson goes back, he goes on his own responsibility." It may be asked, Is not this a new mode of appointment ? A rule of procedure which has not yet received the consent of two-thirds of the Quarterly Boards in the connexion ? And does not the action of the Conference towards London, in the Sessions referred to, prove that the wishes of the people who form the membership of the church, and sustain it, are held as of no consequence when opposed to the sentiments of a leading member of the Conference ? Had even the right of petition been recognized, so that the documents placed in the President's hands would have been laid before the Conference, the result might have been different, for a majority of the members of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference are not wanting in either honesty of purpose or propriety of action ; but this course would not have suited the purpose of Mr. S., and therefore the voice of the people was ruled out of order.

As those who had believed the interests of the church would be best secured by the removal of Mr. S., and had worked for that end, had now little else to expect for the coming year than the full force of his malevolence and enmity, which in the previous year he had not failed to manifest on every possible occasion, a meeting of those who were dissatisfied was called for the purpose of considering what steps were best to take under existing circumstances, and to devise measures for carrying out their decisions. All agreed on one point, namely, not to remain under the spiritual teaching of one who had

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not scrupled to employ, any and every means whatever, however mean and despicable, to gratify his own personal ambition and lust of power; or to recognize him as a pastor, who evinced more skill in diplomacy and intrigue in securing a pulpit, than ability or desire to discharge its duties.

With this determination, a statement of the causes of separation from the church, and a series of resolutions as to their future course, was subscribed to by those withdrawing from the Wesleyan Methodist Church, in good standing, including sixteen of those who had held official positions; and the use of a church building, then unoccupied, having been kindly offered, the little company met together in their new place of worship on the 23rd day of June, for the first time, where they have since continued to enjoy, in peace and harmony, the services of the Sanctuary, having preaching twice on the Sabbath, besides the usual week night services. A Sabbath School was also immediately organized, which has numbered upwards of a hundred regular attendants.

As it may be gratifying to some who have interested themselves in the movement thus made, a copy of the statement is here inserted:

At a meeting of some of the members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in London, C. W., held at the Mechanics' Institute on the evening of Wednesday, the 19th of June 1861—Wm. Bowman, Esq., in the Chair—A Committee was appointed for the purpose of reporting upon some measure of relief for those who feel themselves aggrieved by the return of the Rev. George R. Sanderson, as the Superintendent of the London City Circuit for the present year; and the Committee having met, and after giving the subject due consideration, beg to submit the following

REPORT.

THAT WHEREAS: In the May Quarterly Meeting of 1860, a resolution was passed requesting the Conference to appoint some other ministers than those then appointed, to this station, and the Conference disregarding the said resolution by retaining the Rev. G. R. Sanderson as Superintendent to this Circuit, in opposition to the wishes and feelings of a majority of the Official Board, as well as a large number of the members of the church; and,

WHEREAS: The Rev. G. R. Sanderson has, during the year, deported himself in an offensive and tyrannical manner, alienating the feelings, and wounding the sensibilities of many of the leading and influential members of the church; and exhibiting a spirit altogether opposed to that which might be expected from a person holding the high and sacred office of a minister of the Gospel; and,

WHEREAS: At the May Quarterly Meeting of the present year, 1861, a resolution requesting the Conference to appoint the same minister to this Circuit, was carried by a small number of the members, in a manner which the Committee cannot but consider improper and underhanded; insomuch as a large majority of the Board had left, owing to the lateness of the hour, and with the positive understanding that no more business in connection with the Circuit was to be undertaken; and,

WHEREAS: Several and faithful representations have been made during the late Sessions of Conference, to the President and influential members of that body, by other members and friends of this church, urging a change of minister; and no opportunity having been given to present the subject before Conference, in order to obtain redress:

Therefore, Your Committee believe that that portion of the church opposed to the return of Rev. G. R. Sanderson, have reason to feel justly aggrieved; and regret that the Constitution of the church to which they are so deeply attached, should prevent the voice of the Individual Societies, or any member of the same, from being heard in matters of vital interest to its welfare.

Your Committee in view of the foregoing facts, would therefore suggest that under existing circumstances the following course be pursued.

1st. That, for the present year, or until the removal of the Rev. G. R. Sanderson,

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE SOCIETY,

son from the superintendence of the London City Circuit, the members of the church, feeling so aggrieved, should withdraw from the church, relinquishing their membership and office if held; and refuse in any way to contribute or assist in the maintenance of the church in this Circuit, in any of its financial or partents.

2d. That all so withdrawing, or who may, from similar causes, have withdrawn during the past year, at once organize themselves into a religious body for the purpose of public worship, and the observance of other means of grace, calculated to advance their spiritual welfare, in accordance with the doctrines and practices of the Wesleyan Methodist church.

3d. That a suitable place for the purpose of holding public worship, and other meetings, be at once secured; and that those who have held the office of local preachers be requested to fill the services of the pulpit; that classes be organized, and that a Sabbath School be so made as early as practicable; so that no want may be felt in the customary and usual requirements of a church.

4th. That a Committee be appointed to consist of seven members for the management of matters in connection with the body; and who shall be empowered to carry out such measures as may be directed by the Society.

All which is respectfully submitted.

The Report was unanimously adopted.

From the tenor of the above it will be seen, that those who have separated from the Mother Church, have done so from no hostility or dislike to her principles or doctrines. That its system of government is imperfect, and susceptible of an abuse of power, no one can fail to admit who has read the previous portion of this address; but any desire to differ from the principles and practices of the Wesleyan Methodist Church as established, they utterly repudiate. No system, however complete in itself, will be found to accomplish its object, when those who have charge of the machinery have sinister motives to prompt them; while the most imperfect system may be productive of much good, and work fairly in the hands of those whose energies and aims are rightly directed.

That the doctrines of the Wesleyan Methodist church are founded on the word of God they believe, and maintain, and although disconnected from her, yet they employ all the means of grace as formerly. The regular services of the Sabbath, with the administration of the Sacraments, the prayer-meeting, the lecture, the class-meeting and love-feast form the leading features of the severed branch, as of the parent stem; and no inclination is manifested to allow these to grow into disuse, or to diminish in interest; and as their departure from the original church was not the result of a preconcerted plan; so now they are content to remain for the present, leaving all provision for the future till circumstances shall point out their course of action. With the future they have little to do; but for the present they desire to unite together in thankfulness to Almighty God, that He has so providentially supplied their present want; satisfied that He who has in so kind and fatherly a manner opened up their way, and led them hitherto, will not leave them or forsake them, but will in his own good time show them what they must do. They have proved that it is not in regard to name only, or place only, that God giveth his people; but that whenever His word is preached in simplicity and earnestness, and whenever it is received in faith and with prayer, then He will pour out His blessings upon it. That this has been the result in this case many can testify; and with devout confidence in His direction will continue to look up to God as their God; esteeming it their highest honor and privilege to be acknowledged as His people.

SIMEON MORRILL,
JOHN ELSON,
SAMUEL SCREATON,
GEORGE OLIVER,

W. MCBRIDE,
WILLIAM BOWMAN,
GEORGE TYAS,
J. WINNETT.